

Annual Reports for Maximum Impact (Part II)

Annual reports can vary greatly — with regards to content, page length, tone and more — from one organization to the next. Some of the decisions you make will be guided by budget: For example, if you have budgeted for a four-page annual report versus something longer, this will influence the amount of information and level of detail you can include. Whatever form your annual report takes, however, we hope you'll find the following tips helpful:

- Include your mission and vision statements in a prominent place (many organizations print these important statements on the inside front cover of their report).
- Consider using a letter from your top staff member and/or board chair to tie the content of your report to your mission, vision and any theme/messaging you create. Include a call to action in the letter.
- Make every spread interesting, informative and visually appealing. This means (among other things) breaking up text with plenty of photos and other graphic elements — and leaving ample white space so the reader doesn't feel overwhelmed and stop reading!
- Vary sentence length and be sure to edit carefully and proofread rigorously.
- Don't forget that, even though some of your readers may have known you for a long time, they don't work at your organization every day like you do. Avoid jargon and be sure to define acronyms on first use.
- Use your financials to reinforce the story of your success.
- Create infographics, charts and graphs to make complex information easy to digest. Is there a graphic way of showing that most of your funding goes directly to the services your donors care about, or that you have served increasingly higher numbers of patients over the past five years, for example?
- Many of your readers are likely well educated, but it's still best to write simply and clearly. Experts suggest targeting a ninth-grade reading level.
- While targeting your publication to one primary audience, you may decide to include additional materials for other audiences. (For example, if your annual report will speak mainly to donors, you may want to create special inserts to share volunteer-, staff-, and/or client-specific information.)